

## Continuous CRP sign-up

The continuous CRP sign-up helps landowners install conservation buffers (filter strips, contour grass strips, grassed waterways, field windbreaks, shelterbelts, etc.), mainly on cropland. Under the program's "marginal pastureland provision," farmers also are able to enroll overgrazed, eroded pasture along streams or around lakes and permanent wetlands.

Now, USDA has said that marginal pastureland includes grazing land that has never been seeded. This change makes it possible for you and other ranchers to offer grazing land, including rangeland, for enrollment in the continuous CRP sign-up if you are willing to install a riparian buffer. These riparian buffers must be planted to trees or shrubs.

### Eligibility requirements

Grazing land, including rangeland, is eligible for the continuous CRP sign-up if it is along or around:

- Perennial streams.
- Seasonal streams, excluding gullies or sod waterways.
- Sinkholes, karst areas, and other groundwater recharge areas.
- Other permanent bodies of water, including wetlands.

The land must be suitable for a riparian buffer and cannot have trees on it that already function as a riparian buffer.



*Gordon Canyon, Arizona, after years of season-long grazing.*



*Gordon Canyon, Arizona, after 5 years of exclusion.*



*Lemhi River, Idaho, 1996.*



*Lemhi River, Idaho, 1997.*

Generally, riparian buffers may be up to 100 feet wide. The actual width will depend upon your interests and the conservation needs of your site. Typically, a riparian buffer will include a tree and shrub zone along either side of a stream or around a lake or permanent wetland. A grass filter strip up to 20 feet wide can be added outside that tree and shrub zone if needed for water quality improvement.

You must plant trees or shrubs, or both, in a riparian buffer. Natural regeneration of trees or shrubs may be allowed in some locations. Generally, native species will be appropriate for your specific site.

Livestock must be excluded from a riparian buffer enrolled in the continuous CRP sign-up. But cost-sharing is available to help you install the necessary fencing and develop sources of water supply outside the riparian buffer. You cannot hay or graze the buffer, except in response to USDA-declared emergencies. Weeds, including noxious weeds and other undesirable vegetation, must be controlled. Insect and other pests must also be controlled.

You must own or lease land for one year before you can offer it for enrollment in the continuous CRP sign-up.

### The economics of participation

Unlike the general CRP sign-ups, in which landowners must compete against one another to enroll land, there is no competition under the continuous CRP sign-up. Offers of land for riparian buffers under the continuous CRP sign-up are automatically accepted if the land is suitable for a riparian buffer and all other eligibility requirements are met.

Participants must sign a contract with the federal government covering the enrolled acres. You may choose a length of contract from 10 to 15 years.

In return for the contract, USDA pays landowners an annual rental payment. This payment is calculated using the average rental rate for comparable land and soils in your locale under the general CRP, plus a 20 percent incentive for a riparian buffer. So, if the CRP rental rate for comparable land and soils in your county is \$25 per acre per year, the continuous CRP sign-up contract for a riparian buffer may pay you \$30 per acre per year. Also, there may be an additional payment of up to \$5 per acre per year for maintenance of the riparian buffer, making the total payment \$35 per acre per year.

Up to 50 percent cost-sharing may also be paid to cover practice establishment costs, including plant material; weed control; fencing; water supply development; water gaps, bridges, or other livestock crossing areas needed on small streams; and temporary irrigation systems or plastic mulch to ensure establishment of trees and shrubs in arid areas. In many locations, additional funds from state or local governments, and even the private sector, are available to cover all or part of the remaining 50 percent.

Only you can decide if the economic bottom line favors participation in the continuous CRP sign-up. Compare the annual rental rate and maintenance payment with what you can earn from the land by raising livestock. As you complete this calculation, however, think about how a riparian buffer can improve your grazing system and perhaps provide added income, from fee hunting or fishing, for example. Also, consider the conservation

values you create with buffers—that protection of your land and lifestyle you are concerned about—as well as the goodwill you create among downstream neighbors.

### How to sign up

Signing up for the continuous CRP is simple. Go to your local USDA Service Center. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff will help you determine which acres on your ranch are suitable for riparian buffers. The Farm Service Agency staff will determine if you meet the landowner eligibility requirements and accept your offer for enrollment.

If all requirements are met, you decide how many of the eligible acres you want to offer for enrollment. Your offer will be automatically accepted. You can sign a contract immediately if you accept the terms. The NRCS staff will then work with you to write a conservation plan. Once the conservation plan and continuous CRP sign-up contract are approved, you can begin installing your riparian buffer.



*Texas Creek, Colorado, after years of season-long grazing.*



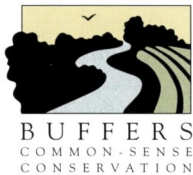
*Texas Creek, Colorado, after 9 years of winter use with no reduction in animal units per month.*



It's your land,  
your way of life,  
your investment.  
Protect it!

## Other programs to install conservation buffers

If participation in the continuous CRP sign-up does not fit your needs, USDA offers other programs that can help you install riparian buffers and other types of conservation buffers. These programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP). Also, state and local government programs, as well as private programs, may be available in your area. Your local USDA Service Center can provide more details.



Photos from USDA NRCS and United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management files.

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## Riparian buffers work economically and environmentally



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Grazing land.  
It's your land and your way of life. It's your investment.  
It's certainly worth protecting.

### And you can

with a new program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Not only can you protect some of your most environmentally sensitive grazing land, including rangeland, but you can receive cost-sharing for conservation practice installation and an annual rental payment "to boot."

Sound too good to be true?

It's not! For the first time, ranchers are eligible to enroll certain marginal pastureland in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) under what's called the continuous CRP sign-up. Already, some ranchers have enrolled strips of marginal pastureland along streams, lakes, and permanent wetlands and planted those strips to trees, shrubs, and grasses. Technically, they've installed riparian buffers. Most ranchers just call them common-sense conservation. Here's why.

Riparian buffers help restore streamside areas because they:

**Stabilize streambanks.** Deep-rooted vegetation binds the soil along streambanks, which prevents bank sloughing during periods of high runoff.

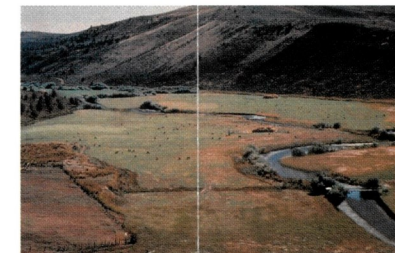
**Improve water quality.** Trees, shrubs, and grasses along streams remove sediment, nutrients, pesticides, pathogens, and other potential pollutants before they enter surface or groundwater.

**Reduce flooding and sedimentation.** Trees and shrubs help retain runoff longer, improve infiltration, and filter out sediment that might otherwise be delivered downstream during floods.

**Enhance wildlife habitat.** Trees and shrubs supply habitat and travel corridors for many wildlife species. Travel corridors are particularly important where habitat is limited.

**Keep streams cooler and healthier.** This increases the food and oxygen available for fish.

**Improve scenery.** Strips of trees and shrubs along streams add diversity and beauty to the landscape.



*In this valley, loss of vegetation and soil erosion on uplands and a lack of grazing management in the riparian corridor has resulted in soil compaction, a lower water table, streambank erosion, loss of native vegetation, and poor fish and wildlife habitat.*



*In this computer-generated "after" picture, conservation treatment of uplands, installation of a riparian buffer, and adoption of rotational grazing and related practices outside the riparian buffer result in a far more profitable and environmentally healthy use of the grassland.*

